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SUBJECT: CDA DISCUSSES ABYEI WITH DIRDIRI

REF: A) KHARTOUM 862 B) KHARTOUM 1135 C) KHARTOUM 1174

¶11. (SBU) Summary: On October 29, CDA Whitehead discussed developments in the Abyei special administrative district with Ambassador Al Dirdiri Mohamed Ahmed (NCP), the Government of Sudan's (GoS) Abyei point-person. Dirdiri said that the migration of Misseriya tribes-people into Abyei this year could be violent if attempts are made to disarm them. He also noted a potential for violence in connection with the national elections this April, and views the outcome of the Abyei referendum as riding entirely on whether the Misseriya are entitled to vote in it. Dirdiri blamed the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) for Misseriya anger about the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) ruling on Abyei (Ref A) and said that attempts to improve their understanding of the PCA decision were unlikely to bear fruit without substantive changes benefiting the Misseriya. Dirdiri appears focused on whether the Misseriya are permitted to participate in the Abyei referendum, perhaps indicating that the GoS will use the Misseriya in an attempt to retain control of Abyei, or as a tool to extract concessions from the SPLM in other areas. End Summary.

Misseriya Will Not Migrate Unarmed

¶12. (SBU) Dirdiri cautioned that hopes for a peaceful migration of Misseriya this year into and through Abyei may not be realistic. (Note: The Misseriya's annual migration south began in mid-October, with the majority of participating Misseriya and their cattle expected to reach the Abyei area by early December. End Note.) Dirdiri stated that if the GoS and the Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS) seek to disarm the Misseriya during their migration there are likely to be conflicts. Dirdiri said that insecurity along the Misseriya migration routes, including in and around Abyei, is rife, and that the Misseriya could not be expected to travel unarmed. He added that the Misseriya will also feel they are crossing a border if asked to disarm upon reaching Abyei, adding to their concerns regarding the PCA decision and boundary demarcation efforts. Regarding demarcation efforts, Dirdiri noted that the GoS had recently sent helicopters to help with the work at the request of the demarcation committee, and that demarcation should be a simple task. (Note: The demarcation of Abyei's boundary in accordance with the PCA ruling has been delayed due to technical hurdles and threats of violence from local Misseriya (Ref B and C). End Note.)

April Elections Could Create Conflict

¶13. (SBU) Dirdiri cautioned that local elections in Abyei next April also create risks. Dirdiri theorized that Dinka running for office in Abyei will consider the movement of Misseriya into Abyei as a

threat to their election chances. He said Dinka politicians could take actions such as spoiling local water sources to force the Misseriya to by-pass Abyei on their southern migration. Dirdiri noted that there are even rumors that the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) has plans to spray herbicide on the grasslands of Abyei to prevent the Misseriya from grazing their cattle. (Note: The SPLA does not have any helicopters from which to spray herbicide. End Note.)

Misseriya Anger Regarding PCA Ruling Blamed on SPLM

¶4. (SBU) Dirdiri accepted that efforts aimed at educating the Misseriya people as to the effect of the PCA decision have not been sufficient, but blamed the SPLM. He said that immediately after the PCA decision was issued, Misseriya leaders were invited to Khartoum and assured that the decision would not negatively affect their people. Dirdiri said the SPLM should have taken similar confidence-building measures, but that instead Salva Kiir, President of the GoSS, told the Misseriya that they should support the SPLM or continue being subservient to the National Congress Party (NCP) and look to the NCP for their future welfare. (Note: Post is unable to confirm this allegation from press reports on Kiir's visit to South Kordofan. End Note.) According to Dirdiri, since then the Misseriya have been angry and disaffected. Dirdiri said the GoS is making efforts to contain this disaffection, for instance, by warning the Misseriya against playing into the hands of Darfur rebel groups, but he noted that currently the Misseriya have denounced both the NCP and the SPLM. When asked whether a visit to Muglad by a high level delegation from the NCP and SPLM could help defuse this tension, Dirdiri said this would be difficult without substantive

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changes, such as confirming that the Misseriya are citizens of Abyei.

Misseriya Vote Will Determine Abyei Referendum

¶5. (SBU) Dirdiri said that the rules governing the Abyei referendum will be extremely contentious, as its outcome will be dictated by whether the Misseriya are permitted to participate. Dirdiri said that if they are allowed to participate, Abyei will clearly remain part of northern Sudan and if they are not permitted to participate, it will go to the south. Dirdiri stated that the SPLM will therefore view the Misseriya vote as a threat to all they have achieved in their struggle for control of Abyei. (Note: The CPA states that the residents of Abyei are "members of the Ngok Dinka community and other Sudanese residing in the area," so while Ngok Dinka residing anywhere in Sudan will be able to vote in the Abyei referendum, only Misseriya determined by the Abyei Referendum Commission to be "residing in the area" can vote. In an October 29 conversation with David Raikow, Political Officer for the United Nations Mission in Sudan, Raikow told Poloff that Dirdiri is overstating the effect of the Misseriya vote, noting that all the Misseriya in Sudan would probably need to converge on Abyei in order to change the outcome of the referendum. Even Dirdiri admitted that the number of non-sedentary Misseriya that migrate through Abyei are limited in number. End Note.)

¶6. (SBU) Comment: Dirdiri appears focused on the Abyei referendum, and to what extent the Misseriya are permitted to participate. Dirdiri may be overstating local Misseriya concern with the outcome of the Abyei referendum. Misseriya living in the area likely care more about their grazing rights in Abyei and southern Sudan, and their right of return to Abyei, and less about whether Abyei is part of northern or southern Sudan. The GoS may use the Misseriya in an attempt to retain control of Abyei, or as a tool to extract concessions from the SPLM in other areas. End Comment.

WHITEHEAD